# Mahesh Dattani's Select Stage Plays as a Replica of Social-Cultural Issues

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## Introduction:

The present research work focuses on how Mahesh Dattani is one of the most successful playwrights and how his plays are addressing social issues, mostly the one which society tries to hide or turns its face away of it. Most of his plays focused on social issues which rooted deeply in the society. The paper contemplates how Mahesh Dattani's plays focus on gender identity, gender discrimination, and communal tensions with reference to plays *Where There's a Will, Tara, Bravely Fought the Queen, Night Queen, Thirty Days in September and Final Solutions.*

It is said that literature is a reflection of society and the plays of Mahesh Dattani is not an exception for the same. Social realism is one of the streams of literature which reflect the society in the literary forms. As time flies many changes occurs in the human life. As life changed so as the problems, but root of some problems are yet in this post modern era. Many literary figures gave best literature to the world but very few able to touch the social issues which are rooted in deep somewhere and Mahesh Dattani is one of them, who focuses on the social problems and issues of Indian society. We get social realism inculcated in his plays.

Many writers have portrayed the harsh realities of society and as the problems were transformed into moral ones, playwrights like Dattani found it their duty to present them to the readers in the form of literary genre. Dattani is known for putting forward the issues that directly concern with the society. He has penned out with various subjects over the years with social issues like gender biases, gender identity, communal tensions and discrimination towards homosexuals, greed, futility of relationships etc. Most of his plays address social issues- the deep-seated prejudices and problems that the society is usually avoiding.

Drama is the mirror of the society and just because of this people can easily connect themselves with this amazing feeling and reality. Mahesh Dattani eliminates the distinction of page and actual life and makes his writing to articulate the voice of marginalized people like eunuchs, gays, lesbians, women and minority communities in the society which is characterized by the changing codes of morality. He effectively uses drama as a powerful tool to present the drastic reality and bring about a change. He works with the characters to recreate

his texts in a form which suits their approach to performance. His plays convey the physical and special awareness of the Indian theatre with the textual strictness of western models like Ibsen and Tennessee Williams. It is a potent combination and approaches a subject from multiple perspectives. Through the fusion of forms and influences, Mahesh Dattani has created such a space in which the mingling of eastern and western literature influences can take place.

The issues Mahesh Dattani raises in his plays are communal dispense between Hindus and Muslims, prohibited same sex marriage, female subservience, and suppressed and propitiated life style of sexual minorities like eunuchs and bisexuals. Hence, his plays appear to be both revolting and sometimes disgraceful. Dattani explores the life of urban middle class people who live gloomy and depressed existence and caught between the deep dilemma of conventionality and modernity. He also portrays their strong dissatisfaction with the socioeconomic and political conditions of the time and gives vent to the dissatisfaction and unhappiness, the people feel at the failure of the welfare state. It is also shown how their anger and frustration force them to be the rebel. Dattani's plays attack the cruel traditions and attitudes of the rigid class system in contemporary social milieu. With its focus on a realistic portrayal of prevented minorities, they can be seen as a reaction against the plays written during pre – independence period. The characters are ordinary middle class youth, socially and mentally unsatisfied and live in cramped conditions.

Mahesh Dattani's art of writing reflects different mind sates , emotions and ideas, desires and aspirations, strengths and weakness, basic moral and social questions as well as individual predicaments. They also focus on a real and true picture of the social, political, economic and cultural life of the times.

His plays like- *Where There's a Will (1988), Dance Like a Man (1989), Tara (1990), Bravely Fought the Queen (1991), Final Solutions (1993),Do the Needful (1997), On a Muggy Night in Mumbai (1998), Seven Steps Around the Fire (1999) and Thirty Days in September (2001)* broke all the obstacles in the history of literature across the globe.

## Review of Literature and Development in the subject:

The present research makes a modest attempt to explore the critical study of Dattani's select plays. The research aims at unfolding the various aspects of his plays. Dattani is widely appreciated for his technical excellences as well as displaying a wide range of themes and subjects. This study is basically text-oriented. These select plays have made bold innovations and experiments, dealt with themes related to the social scenario, social change, and socio-

cultural revolution to make the people aware of the need to reform the present social structure. The plays deal with the aspirations of the deprived mid marginalized sections of society and depict the acute conflicts of contemporary city life. The research has preferred to study his plays following the chronology of their creation in a view to assess the various developmental stages in Dattani's career as a dramatist.

The researchers have attempted to explore the various angels of Mahesh Dattani's contribution in Indian English Drama and on the dynamics as an innovative playwright.

A brief review of the research corpus is as follows:

Some research works have been cited to complete the following research.

**Prof. Bipin Parmar** has obtained his Ph. D. on the topic entitled, "***A Critical Study of Dramatic Works of Mahesh Dattani"*** submitted to Saurashtra University. The research evaluates Dattani's stage, radio and screen plays with the radical analysis on thematic concerns, issues and detail investigation of his plays.

**M. S. Saritha**, Department Of English Rathnavel Subramaniam College of Arts & Science (Autonomous) Coimbatore – 641 402 Tamil Nadu, India has completed her research with the topic: **"*Social Milieu In The Select Plays Of Mahesh Dattani.*",** in the year **2014,** under the Supervision of Dr. P. Thirunavukkarasu.

As well **Mr. Rajendra Raghunath Rajput** completed a research work from North Maharashtra University, Jalgaon with the title: " ***A Study Of Social Issues In The Plays Of Mahesh Dattani"*** under the guidance of Dr. Subhash Zanke in the year **2018**.

**Dr. Beena Agrawal's *"Mahesh Dattani's Plays: A New Horizon in Indian Theatre"*** is a sincere effort to fill the gap of comprehensive critical studies in the realm of Indian English Drama. It presents elaborative analysis of Dattani's major plays including his radio plays and screenplays. The analysis focuses on socio-psychological and socio-philosophical dimensions of the issues integrated in the different texts of the plays. It also elevates the synthesis of the richness of thought and the dexterity of technique in the context of contemporary Indian theatrical practice.

All the researches having different perspectives in comparison the selected topic for the research study which will add another perspective to study Mahesh Dattani's work.

This study includes the study of his following enlisted work.

## Aims and Objectives of the Research:

a. To study the interconnection of social issues and Mahesh Dattani's work.

b. To compare social issues and Popular Dramas.

c. To find out the pattern of selection of objects and themes of genres of literature and their connection with society.

## Proposed Hypothesis of the Research:

a. There is great influence of society on any kind of literature.

b. Dattani's Literature is influenced by the society and vice versa.

c. Literature and Social pictures are interconnected with each other.

## Methodology to be adopted:

In the current study, descriptive and analytical methods as well reading of primary and secondary literature will be preferred.

## Significance of the Study:

There is very close relations between society and literature. Hence, it is very essential to study on the interconnection between it. It will help to understand the main aim of writings and the several genres of literature.

## Proposed work Plan and targets to be achieved:

This study includes the study of the following plays in line with the title of research:

1. *Where There's a Will* (1988)
2. *Tara* (1990)
3. *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991)
4. *Night Queen* (Short Play) (1996)
5. *Final Solutions* (1993)
6. *Where Did I Leave My Purdah* (2012)
7. *The Big Fat City* (2012)

**Tentative Chapter Plan:**

The current research work is divided into seven chapters. The tentative plan is as:

**Chapter One: Introduction**

It will be introductory chapter and will discuss on the basic concepts of drama and select literature. It will focus on the literature review is short with presentation of aims and objectives of the study, methodology of study, hypothesis, significance and sources of the study.

**Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

The second chapter will focus on the previous work completed on the literature of Mahesh Dattani. It will provide details of review from the different perspectives of the research scholar.

**Chapter Three: A Replica of Exorcism**

The third chapter will discuss a play from Mahesh Dattani's pen, *Where There's a Will***.** The play has several interesting aspects. Dattani, the selected playwright, described it as the exorcism of the patriarchal code. Women –whether she is, daughter-in-law, wife or mistress - are dependent on men and this play shows what' happens when they are pushed to the edge. The play, *Where There's a Will*, is also interpreted in regard to the passive instinct of the rich and the moneyed in the society. The play is about the chaos reigning in a family due to the emotional and temperamental incompatibility of the members. The research also works on how every individual have literally no alternative than living in forced harmony.

**Chapter Four: A Replica of Gender Discriminations**

This chapter will focus on Dattani's play *Tara***,** written in 1990. Tara is the most often performed play. It is about young people but the issues are serious. It is performed all over the places, in schools and colleges, amateur groups and repertories. It was a box-office success in the many theaters of Mumbai, Kolkata and New Delhi. Dealing with gender issue in the play, he becomes a spokesperson of all the marginalized section of the society. He was also awarded the Sahitya Kala Award for best production of this play, in the year 2000. It is not just the story of the protagonist of the play Tara, but it is admired as the story of every girl child in Indian family whether urban or rural. One of Dattani's best loved plays the world over, Tara, addresses questions of gender in many ways.

**Chapter Five: A Replica of Men and Women Relationship**

The fifth chapter will focus on **Bravely Fought the Queen** (1991), a well-known drama of Mahesh Dattani

A completely different kind of play, much dark, starkly serious and violent, Bravely Fought the Queen was first performed at the Sophia Bhabha Hall, Mumbai on 2nd August 1991. The play was subsequently performed by Border Crossings, UK, in 1996, and was directed by Michael Walling and Mahesh Dattani himself.

It is Dattani's famous play, rather disturbing picture of the relations between men and women in a wealthy isolated suburb of Bangalore. The play traces the lives of two sisters married to two brothers, living side by side in the same bungalows. It was partly inspired by Dattani's observation while visiting the home of a Gujarati family that the women of the house were always dressed up but had nowhere to go. A powerful domestic tragedy, this play highlights the circumstances of a woman fighting against all the odds that the forces of the patriarchy have bestowed upon her. As a lively and provocative play, it charters through the emotional, financial and sexual intricacies of a modern-day Indian family.

**Chapter Six: A Replica of homosexuality**

Chapter sixth will discuss another play of Dattani and how it reflects social – cultural issues. *Night Queen* is a short play published in 1996.

The play is about these two homosexual characters who meet up for a 'one night stand' of sorts and how their lives spill into their tryst. In the middle of the play, it is revealed that their lives intersect at a very volatile and unexpected point. Dattani shows "gay bashing and gay bullying" by straight people in a very sensitive yet unsentimental way in this play.

**Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

This is final and concluding chapter which will explain the findings and suggestions of current study.

## References:

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3. *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991)
4. *Night Queen* (Short Play) (1996)
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**Signature** **Signature**

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